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## HIGH-SCHOOL COURSES OF STUDY

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The defects in our high-school courses of study are twofold: some of the courses are invertebrate and most of the courses are too rigid.

At present most Wisconsin high schools have a "modern-classical" course containing four units of Latin and two or more each of German, English, history, mathematics, and science; a "general-science" course, so called not because it contains more of the natural sciences but because it contains two units of the science of German; and an English course which does not give additional emphasis to English but which consists of what is left after Latin and German are subtracted from the other courses.

Such an English course reminds me of some chicken I once ordered in a native restaurant in Athens. The first day it was on the bill of fare "Greek style" and it proved to be excellent; the next day it was "Turkish style" and was the same chicken warmed over; the third day it was "*à l'anglaise*" and was the same chicken warmed over a second time. When I see one of these English courses with all the goodness taken out of them, I seem to taste again that chicken "*à l'anglaise*."

Every course of study should have a backbone consisting of four units of some one subject, and the course should be named from this major group; so that a diploma from the "science course" will signify that the graduate has actually been studying the sciences.

In addition, every course should require two units each of English, history, science, and perhaps of mathematics. Such a course will give a pupil that partial view of several fields of knowledge, and that more intimate acquaintance with one field that is essential as a foundation on which to erect a structure of culture.

The minimum requirements exacted by the Wisconsin State Department of all free high schools, though somewhat more rigid than the above suggestions, nevertheless furnish an excellent basis for an elective course. Taking these requirements as a basis and adding others, a course may be arranged as follows:

STUDIES REQUIRED BY STATE DEPARTMENT

Algebra, 1 unit.

Geometry, 1 unit.

English, 2 units (of which  $\frac{1}{2}$  unit must be composition).

Science, 2 units (of which 1 unit must be Physics).

History,  $2\frac{1}{2}$  units (two units if six units of foreign language are taken).

ADDITIONAL CREDITS REQUIRED BY LOCAL HIGH SCHOOL

Gymnasium, 1 unit.

Rhetoricals, 1 unit.

Elective,  $7\frac{1}{2}$  units.

Total required for graduation, 18 units *of which four must be in a department in which a diploma is given.*

The course will also need to state: First, the departments in which diplomas are given (one or more of the following: Commercial, domestic science, English, German, history, Latin, manual training, mathematics, science); second, a list of all studies offered in the high school with the amount of credit given in each; third, an additional grouping of high-school studies to show which may be taken first year and what ones may be elected the second year.

Within these limitations every pupil should be allowed to make his own course of study subject to three limitations: First, he may take only those studies which his previous training has prepared him; second, to obtain a diploma, he must meet the requirements outlined above; and third, to obtain a recommendation to any college, he must so select his studies as to meet the requirements of that college.

The necessity for these limitations is self-evident. Obviously a pupil should not be permitted to take a study in which he will waste his own time or retard the progress of the class.

It is equally clear that every pupil must meet the minimum requirements for graduation, but someone may think eighteen units an excessive requirement. The eighteen units are obtained by assuming that a pupil will take four studies a day, making a total of sixteen units, and to this number adding one unit each for gymnasium and rhetoricals. To give credit ( $\frac{1}{8}$  of a unit each semester) for gymnasium and the same amount for rhetoricals and then proportionately to increase the graduation requirement may seem playing with figures—but not so; for, under this arrangement, a pupil who for any reason fails to get credit some semester in gymnasium or rhetoricals, thereby gets one-eighth of a unit behind grade and must make this up. Since some may need, from physical defects or other sufficient reasons, to be excused from one or both of these branches, a course of study should not absolutely require one unit of credit in each of these subjects, but should insist upon the total of eighteen units' credit, requiring all who for any reason fail to obtain full credit in gymnasium and rhetorical work to make up the deficiency by extra credits in other branches. This will lessen the tendency some pupils have to avoid these branches and will stimulate the indifferent pupil who does take them to attain at least to the minimum standard of performance for which credit is given.

The third limitation is necessary, because many pupils imagine that a high-school diploma will open the college doors regardless of course pursued. In order that the pupil may have before him some typical entrance requirements, it is well in printing the course of study to include a summary of the entrance requirements of the state university.

That, with such limitations as will insure a broad and solid course, a student should be given every opportunity to arrange his course so as to meet any special requirements that a college or a business position may make of him seems to me too self-evident to need argument; but some who concede the justice of the elective system are deterred from trying it by apparent difficulties in operating such a system.

"There will be too great uncertainty as to the number of pupils who will take each branch," one argues. This can be

entirely obviated by getting from each pupil before the close of a semester, a list of the studies he purposes taking next semester. A high school has a great advantage in organization over a college from the fact that the greater part of the prospective students are already at hand in the eighth grade, where they can be given explanations concerning the courses of study and make their elections before entering high school. Sufficiently complete data may be secured before the close of any semester to enable the principal to confidently organize his scheme and to make a programme before the pupils assemble for the new semester.

"Pupils will seek easy studies," another urges. If pupils tend to flow along channels of least resistance, elective exercises are an excellent device for determining levels, and when the low spots are located they can be filled, until the flood of students covers the curriculum to an even depth.

"An elective system increases the power of the principal," urges some supervising officer. The truth of this is granted, but it is an advantage. If a principal is so incompetent or so malicious that the school as a whole, or individual pupils, need be safeguarded against him by tying his hands with a rigid course of study, he is not fit for his position.

"But pupils may not choose wisely," a cautious principal declares. Suppose that boys with hands created to wield sledgehammers will continue to elect shorthand under the misapprehension that they have been called to be stenographers. Such mistakes will be made under any system, but under an elective system the mistake can be more easily rectified, and the temptation to continue in an unprofitable line merely for the sake of obtaining a diploma will be lessened.

"But many pupils do not know what they want," still another urges. This is true and for the guidance of such pupils it is well, in connection with the printed courses of study, to print some type courses showing *one* way in which the requirement for each diploma may be met. Such tables will look exactly like the rigid courses of study with which we are all familiar, and someone will say, "after all, then, you have gotten back to the old style of

courses of study." But not so, for these suggestive courses are *suggestive only* and, while they furnish suggestions to the pupil who desires them, they do not prevent another pupil who knows what he does want, from doing something else.

There are some distinct administrative advantages in an elective system. Pupils entering from other schools are more easily absorbed into the system; and students not in any regular course cause less confusion. A student can more readily adjust himself to the necessities of the daily programme, and the deadlock that occurs when Seniors have "irrepressible conflicts" with required studies, disappears.

An increased definiteness is given to the whole situation when each pupil realizes that his advancement from class to class and his ultimate graduation depend wholly upon the number of units credit he possesses. The moment a pupil has four and one-half units' credit he ceases to be a first-year pupil and becomes a second-year pupil, and whenever he approaches a school year with thirteen and one-half units to his credit, he can graduate that year without extra work; otherwise he cannot. This clear knowledge on the part of every pupil as to just where he stands solves a multitude of vexatious questions concerning grade and graduation that arise under fixed courses. After several years of experience with both systems it seems to me that elective courses as compared with fixed courses have material advantages and no serious disadvantage.